

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council
Minutes
November 10, 2021

Members Present:

Marsha Legg, Chair
Scott Dennis
Christy Stuart
Penny Reeder
Melissa Blubaugh
Tom Laverty
Rene Averitt-Sanzone
Katherine Jones
Ronza Othman
Chris Conklin

DORS Liaisons to Council:

Jody Boone – OFS Director
Kim Schultz, DORS – Public Relations
Jean Jackson – WTC Director
Toni March – OBVS Director

Guests:

Roxanne Rattray Simonds
Aaron Expinoza

Support Staff for Council:

Sandy Bowser
Patrick Peto

Welcome & Opening Remarks – Marsha Legg

Marsha Legg, SRC Chair started the meeting by welcoming everyone.

Welcome to the new newest members:

Melissa Blubaugh – to represent the Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council.
Ronza Othman – to represent the National Federation of the Blind.
Ronza is the President for the National Federation of the Blind for Maryland.

The minutes from May 12, 2021 and September 22, 2021 are approved as written.

SRC Membership Training – Follow-Up – Scott Dennis

The SRC Members that attended the September membership training provided very positive feedback. Comments included – very helpful, training was valuable and beneficial, gave a better understanding of how much responsibility the DORS counselors have across the state.

Suggestion was made to provide this training the Community Rehabilitation Programs.

This training will be recorded and posted on the SRC Website for new members to take at their convenience.

Combined Statewide Plan

Each State must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the State's workforce development system. Thank you to the SRC members that participated, provided comments and feedback on items that is reviewed by the SRC. The Plan will be presented to the Governor's Workforce Board in December and will be open to the public for comment. A link will be posted on the DORS website for those who wish to review the plan in its entirety.

SRC 2022 Meeting Dates:

The 2022 SRC Meeting dates are as follows:

- February 9, 2022 – Zoom only
- May 11, 2022 – Zoom and in-person.
- September 14, 2022 – Zoom and in-person
- November 9, 2022 – Zoom only

All in-person meetings will be held from 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. at:

Workforce & Technology Center
Room T-130
2301 Argonne Drive
Baltimore, MD 21218

The DORS Annual Planning Meeting will be held on April 21, 2022. SRC members are encouraged to attend. Details will be sent out in February, 2022.

The State Rehabilitation Council has a new email address. Members of the public can email the SRC via email – src.dors@maryland.gov. This email account will be monitored by Sandy and inquiries will be forwarded to the SRC chair.

DORS Annual Plan Discussion – Patrick Peto

Presentation on the DORS 2021 Annual Plan was provided by Patrick.

Goal 1: Assure high-quality integrated employment outcomes for individuals with most significant disabilities in Maryland through the vocational program.

Objective 1.1

Provide quality customer service consistent with the Governor's Customer Service Promise.

DORS has a new Quality Assurance Staff Specialist Roxanne Rattray-Simmons to start November 24, 2021. DORS is looking at resuming the Quality Assurance Review Program throughout the state.

The next Customer Satisfaction Survey will start in January 2022.

Objective 1.2

Provide rehabilitation services for youth with disabilities in collaboration with Local School Systems and workforce partners that lead to successful outcomes in post-secondary education and/or employment.

A large focus for DORS is our students with disabilities and our transition youth population. In the last few years, the population that DORS serves is getting younger – 24 and younger makes up over 50% of consumers that DORS serves.

Objective 1.3

DORS will provide high quality services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities served by the Office of Field Services.

Office of Field Services will achieve 1,055 Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes.

Objective 1.4

DORS will provide high-quality services and outcomes for individuals who are blind, vision impaired and Deaf-Blind.

Office for Blindness & Vision Services will achieve 107 Competitive Employment Outcomes and 174 successful outcomes for the Independent Living Older Blind Program.

Objective 1.5

Provide effective services at the Workforce & Technology Center using state-of-art interdisciplinary strategies.

Continue to provide high quality in-person and virtual services to individuals with significant disabilities.

Goal 2: Assure high quality Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for qualified students with disabilities.

Objective 2.1

DORS will utilize resources to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services as required.

Utilize resources outside of the assigned field counselor to implement Pre-ETS and transition services that promoted educational achievement, independence and long term career success.

DORS will have videos on our website that explains the referral process and what happens once you have been referred in order to provide a consistent message.

Goal 3: Maximize the self-sufficiency of people with disabilities through the Disability Determination Services program (DDS).

Goal 4: Partner and collaborate with other WIOA programs, private organization, employers, and community groups to advance the employment and independence of individuals with disabilities.

Objective 4.1

Evaluate and monitor service delivery for consistency with WIOA priorities.

Continue to the tracking of the Benchmarks of Success for Maryland's Workforce System.

Progress will be made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Comprehensive Statewide assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities in Maryland.

CRP Advisory Council meetings have resumed and will meet three times per year.

Objective 4.2

Enhance collaboration with and services to Maryland private and public employers.

Regional Business Services Representatives and WTC Employment Specialists will provide, enhance, and track services to businesses including recruitment assistance, technical assistance for tax incentives, development of work-based learning opportunities, OJT and customized training, apprenticeships, retention services, and disability awareness and ADA training.

Objective 4.3

DORS will provide support to the State Rehabilitation Council to maintain and enhance its leadership role in the oversight of vocational rehabilitation service delivery in Maryland.

Objective 4.4

Promote and enhance quality independent living outcomes for individuals with disabilities in Maryland through independent living programs.

Objective 4.5

Evaluate partner connection for consumers receiving Social Security Benefits

Goal 5: Provide infrastructure to promote and support the accomplishment of the DORS mission

Objective 5.1

Implement strategies required by WIOA and in accordance with the Combined State Plan

Objective 5.2

Increase staff competency and satisfaction by providing ongoing staff training, professional development, and leadership development programs while intentionally promoting a culture of staff retention.

Objective 5.3

Promote strategic use of accessible technology and establish policy and internal controls to support staff effectiveness and efficiency, including teleworking.

Develop and launch DORS Eligibility Unit (EDU) to align staff resources to centrally process all applications for service to address increased counselor workloads while promoting a consistent consumer experience.

Please forward all comments, feedback to Patrick.

Director Report – Scott Dennis

Formation of Intake/Eligibility Unit

DORS is implementing a new Eligibility Unit (EDU). This unit will consist of approximately 12 staff including supervisors, counselors and support staff to provide intake and determine eligibility for consumers. The intake specialist will make the eligibility determination and also decide what services will be provided to the consumer – VR or Pre-ETS. Once eligibility has been determined the case would then be assigned to the field counselor who would begin the planning process.

Various workgroups have been created to work on a number of aspects in the development of this new unit. These workgroups will focus on areas such as staffing needs and workload, workflow, policy, procedures, forms, case management, and training.

Although this unit will be centrally located at the Workforce & Technology Center, some staff will be based in field offices around the state.

The EDU is expected to be in place by mid February 2022.

Meeting with Superintendent Choudhury

The Maryland State Department of Education has a new Superintendent – Mr. Mohammed Choudhury. The Division of Rehabilitation Services will now report directly to the State Superintendent, Mr. Choudhury.

Mr. Choudhury is very interested in the DORS program - what is going on, what we are doing, where we are making changes, how we are making changes, and data analysis.

Scott is meeting with Mr. Choudhury monthly to discuss the issues surrounding the Division as well as the Disability Determination Program. Mr. Choudhury has expressed concerns about our ability to recruit staff and salaries as compared to other agencies at the same level. Due to this concern, DORS will conduct a review to look at this.

First Quarter of PY 21 Performance Update

DORS has changed our traditional reporting period from the Federal Fiscal year to Program (PY). The Program Year begins July 1 and ends on June 30th which matches up with the State Fiscal year.

During the First Quarter:

- 320 individuals achieved competitive employment and their cases were closed.
- 313 individuals were most significantly disabled – Category I
- 7 individuals were significantly disabled – Category II – which was opened up for a short period of time.
- Overall Workload – 19,068 open cases – VR, Pre-ETS, and Referrals
- 2,737 are on the waiting list
- 16,951 – Active caseloads
- Counselor Vacancy is 25%

DORS is actively recruiting for positions for the VR Program and DDS. There are about 125 vacant positions statewide.

Membership Discussion

SRC Members Committee signup – SRC Members that are not signed-up for a sub-committee are encouraged to do so.

Policy & Quality Assurance – Tom Laverty

Future focus will be on the new Eligibility Unit

Blindness and Vision Services – Toni March

The next meeting will be held November 30th.

Membership – Marsha Legg

There are two demographic communities that are not represented on the SRC – the Hispanic Community and the Asian Community. Scott is working with individuals to try and fill this requirement.

Employment/Career Development and Strategic Planning and Public Relations Committees need Chairs to conduct and schedule meetings.

Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted

Sandy Bowser

MSRC Staff Support